



News Release

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Shellfish harvest approved for bay in Thurston County's Henderson Inlet

First improvement since downgrades began in 1984

OLYMPIA — Harvest restrictions in place since 2001 have been lifted in Henderson Inlet. Shellfish harvest is now approved for the area, which previously was closed to commercial shellfish harvest for five days after rainfall of one inch or more.

The state Department of Health recently reclassified this area of about 240 acres. The inlet drains heavily developed areas of Lacey, Olympia, and other parts of Thurston County. The southern part of the bay remains prohibited to harvesting due to pollution concerns from Woodland Creek.

“For more than 20 years, it looked like all of Henderson Inlet would be closed to shellfish harvest due to pollution. Thanks to area residents and Thurston County’s leadership, this is no longer true,” said Gregg Grunenfelder, assistant secretary for the Department of Health.

“Without doubt, this is one of the state’s most successful shellfish restoration projects.”

Henderson Inlet is one of five inlets that form the southern end of Puget Sound. It’s located between Budd Inlet on the west and Nisqually Reach on the east. The five-mile long inlet is fed by a 30,000 acre watershed. Woodland and Woodard creeks are the largest of the five main tributaries to Henderson Inlet.

Declining water quality in Henderson Inlet led to several shellfish classification downgrades between 1984 and 2005. Thurston County formed a shellfish protection district to address the water quality problems in the watershed. A stakeholder committee of 11 citizens and local agencies made recommendations to address pollution associated with stormwater runoff, septic systems, pet waste, and farm animals. Actions to control pollution also include outreach and education, telling community members about water quality issues in the area.

Thurston County Commission Chair Sandra Romero says the level of cooperation it took to reverse the pollution in Henderson Inlet is significant. “County staff worked with many agencies including the state Departments of Health and Ecology on this effort and put in many, many hours of their own. But a lot of credit also goes to Henderson Inlet area residents for their individual efforts to reduce the impacts of poorly operating septic systems, and to the citizen members of the Shellfish Protection District Committee.”

The county also created a successful program that focuses on enhanced operations and maintenance for septic systems. It also provides education for residents with septic systems in the area. The City of Lacey has worked to reduce stormwater pollution in Woodland Creek and residents have taken individual actions to improve water quality in the watershed.

“This is good news for Henderson Inlet and shows we can and are making progress in our efforts to restore Puget Sound,” said David Dicks, executive director for the Puget Sound Partnership.

“We have many challenges ahead, but if we all work together and focus our efforts we can protect, restore, and reduce pollution to ensure Puget Sound is both clean and healthy, and supports a thriving economy.”

The Department of Health has [shellfish information](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/default.htm) (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/default.htm>) online.

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Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at http://www.doh.wa.gov for a healthy dose of information.
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